

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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USDA AWARDS \$250,000 FOR TIOGA REAP'S SMALL BUSINESS CREATION PLAN

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) announced today that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has approved a \$250,000 grant to the Tioga County Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zone to study the feasibility of developing an "agribator" facility to help small business start-ups.

"One of the great resources we have to draw from in redeveloping Tioga County's economy is a great core of entrepreneurs," said Hinchey. "There are a lot of innovative, talented small business people working out of their homes or farms, who need just a little bit of business support to thrive. This award from the USDA will help us determine the most efficient ways that we can provide that support, whether it's through the establishment of common production facilities, marketing and distribution assistance, conference centers or other means."

The Tioga County REAP Zone applied for funding to study the feasibility of its "Agribator" concept, a multi-use facility focused toward servicing agriculturally related enterprises. The facility would provide entrepreneurs with a multi-faceted strategy designed to strengthen their businesses. Four components of the Agribator proposal include:

- An incubator kitchen and/or meat processing center, to help small scale food processors who want to increase their production or expand their product lines;
- Marketing and distribution support, including training in marketing strategies and collaborative distribution facilities;
- A full range of business management training and education; and
- A conferencing center.

The study is expected to be completed within 18 months.

The USDA has awarded \$250,000 to Tioga County through its Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) program, which provides grants to communities for technical assistance, training and planning activities that will improve economic conditions in rural areas. The project was one of 51 grants awarded funding by USDA this week, and was the only project to receive funding in New York State.

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The Tioga REAP Zone was created in 1999 through an agreement between Hinchey, the Secretary of Agriculture and local leaders to assist the area in community development. As a REAP Zone-endorsed project, the grant application received discretionary points in the competitive selection process.